

Folklorists see folklore as the foundation upon which all other culture is based. To understand culture at all, one must understand folk culture. This introductory course emphasizes living folklore, and especially the roles of folklore in the lives of the students taking the class. Readings will concentrate on American folk culture from the eighteenth century forward, and writing assignments will require students to examine their own personal and community folklore.

After two weeks devoted to a definition of folklore, the course surveys major scholarly approaches to folklore and the genres best known to residents of the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century: beliefs, legends, historical traditions, festivals, jokes, tall tales, riddles, and proverbs. The course also devotes considerable time to many of the cultures well represented in Houston's population: African American, Anglo-American, Asian American, Cajun, Creole, and Mexican American, among others. We conclude with assignments focused on the question of what, if anything, is unique about or definitive of American folklore.

The two major writing assignments require students to collect folklore: first, students conduct a self-survey, collecting folklore exclusively through their own memories; later, they record and analyze the lore of others.

There are also two exams.

**Goals:** a basic understanding of folklore and its working in the student's personal experience and in the lives of others; an introduction to the scholarship of folklore, its premises, and its uses; an exploration of folklore's role in American culture; introduction to the methods and ethics of interviewing.

**Texts: [n.b.: you will be asked to order the books via the Internet, where the texts are considerably less expensive than in bookstores]**

Brunvand, Jan H., ed. *Readings in American Folklore*. New York: Norton, 1979.

Dorson, Richard M., ed. *Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964.

Reader. A booklet of outlines assembled for this course and available via email from the instructor